

## SECOND WEDGE

Driving the wedge with a maul  
I split straight grain of tamarack and lodgepole  
At times my aim is off a shade  
enough to cripple the sharp edge  
burying the blade

*I pat my son's back whenever I can  
pump his hand coming and going year after year  
Our parting ritual is mutually understood  
These small gestures mean the world*

Sometimes my maul drives the willing wedge  
shoulder deep into the wood  
but stubborn grain in a warped core  
won't cleanly split, the blade held fast  
by a thick-knuckled fist inside the skin of red fir

*We are men; we suffer wounds in silence  
But there's no shame in a helping hand  
This is not weakness, so why speak of it  
Small gestures mean the world*

Sometimes only a second wedge  
can convince the wide girth  
to split, muscling halves apart  
with a crack as sharp  
as a gunshot

*When the fire whistles, snaps  
and spits embers onto the hearth,  
we nod in silence: a tough knot  
is about to sing*